Land Reform Progress

—— New Farms from Old Artillery Range

By HAYNES MAHONEY

IN THE ROLLING HILLS of Parsburg county in central Bavaria a group of refugees recently stood watching plows churning up the dark-brown earth of a former German artillery range. Riding the tractors which hauled the plows were Mr. Kenneth E. Ingwalson, Director of the Food and Agriculture Division, OMG Bavaria, and Dr. Alois Schloegl, the Bavarian minister of agriculture.

The moving plowshares were actually writing the beginning of a new chapter in the lives of the onlookers, and the presence of the two officials symbolized the cooperation of Military Government and the Bavarian government in making their new opportunity possible.

Only a few moments earlier Dr. Schloegl had handed the head of each of the 30 refugee families a letter certifying his ownership of 25 acres of the German army maneuver ground known as Hohenels. His act culminated six weeks of earnest cooperation between local MG officials, county leaders and refugee representatives.

A committee made up of these groups had cut the tangles of red tape, procured the ground from the Land Settlement Agency, leased barracks and arranged for their erection on the new farm sites, hurdled all the obstacles of building codes, water and light requirements and obtained money to finance the first plowing and planting.

ALTHOUGH UNDER consideration as early as the spring of 1946, the whole project had looked very doubtful even six weeks before the ceremonial transfer, in view of the near penniless condition of the refugees, their almost complete lack of tools and livestock. The 750 acres of available land also boasted no development of any kind, except for several heaps of stone which once had been farmhouses of peasants expropriated a decade ago to make way for gunnery practice.

But for the first time, local MG officials and German leaders, working together, had developed a hopeful resettlement project. With funds advanced by the state Land Settlement Agency, tractors and plows had been hired and seed purchased. Within a few weeks the new farmers expected to have winter wheat sown and to move into their temporary barracks homes with their families.

Dr. Schloegl, enthusiastic over the prospects of converting the homeless refugees into producing members of the Bavarian society, promised each of the families 25 chickens, which in most cases would constitute their only livestock.

IT WAS SIGNIFICANT that officials from neighboring counties attended the sendoff ceremony to learn how this preliminary success had been achieved. They too had farmers without farms and land to be redistributed under the land reform program in their counties.

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OMGB chart shows resettlement possibilities of land reform.

Josef Koehler best expressed the feelings of his 29 fellow homesteaders as he crumbled a clod of the freshly turned earth between his fingers:

"I can make a good living on 21 acres. I only had 18 acres in the Sudetenland, and the land was poorer. It may be five or six years before we can build houses, but give us the land and we can get along."

The project at Parsburg is indicative of the new progress made in land reform and resettlement of refugee farmers in Bavaria since the OMG Food, Agriculture and Forestry Division created a special section to step (Continued on next page)
up this program. In April five agricultural field officers and a section head in Munich were assigned exclusively to ironing out the many complications that had made land reform look hopeless for the past two years.

“We felt that perhaps German officials did not understand how the job could be done,” Mr. Pavel P. Egoroff, chief of the Land Reform section said. “Military Government wanted to help.”

UNDER THE BAVARIAN Land Reform Law, promulgated in September 1946, 175,000 acres of land should be provided for the resettlement of landless refugee farmers. The land is procured from cultural holdings in excess of 250 acres, former German army and Nazi-held land and various other lands including forests suitable for conversion, moorlands, etc.

For two and a half years progress in transferring these properties to the Land Settlement Agency and establishing new farms and gardens was negligible. Many officials were indifferent or hostile to the program. Funds allocated to the Land Settlement Agency were pitifully inadequate. The majority of the land owners refused to give up their excess holdings and fought expropriation proceedings in the various settlement agencies and in the courts.

Since OMG Bavaria’s Land reform specialists went into action four months ago, substantial progress has been noted in taking over available land and setting up new farms. Of the 372 landowners whose farms were affected by the land reform law, only 105 had voluntarily given up their excess land to the Settlement Agency.

By personal contact with many of the recalcitrant landowners, the MG field advisers found that they were more sympathetic with the program once they understood its social and economic importance in solving the refugee problem. As a result some 55 landowners withdrew their protest suits against the courts and volunteered their land, making an additional 12,750 acres available for resettlement purposes. This was almost as much as had been taken over in the previous two and one-half years.

AT THE SAME TIME the land reform specialists also attacked the other side of the problem—the settlement of refugees on the land. One of the chief bottlenecks had always been lack of funds. A study of this problem by the OMG Food and Agriculture Division revealed that German officials had not used all the available financial resources. Military Government pointed the way for them to obtain substantial—though far from sufficient—additional funds.

It also was discovered that German agencies had not utilized the energy and initiative of refugees themselves in establishing new farms. Investigating the attitudes of these land-hungry new citizens, the land reform specialists found that in many regions they were anxious to start farming with their own limited resources and very limited help from the state.

Working with local MG officers, the agriculture specialists set out to get the refugees their chance. They inspired the organization of action committees of refugees, developed interest among German officials and organized help from native farmers. The Hohenfels resettlement project resulted from the combined efforts of Mr. Evan L. Owen, land reform specialist, and Mr. Elmo A. Marsh, local MG officer, in developing local initiative by refugees, farmers and officials in Parsberg.

Today Bavarian state officials show an interest in executing the land reform law, an interest which had not been evident during the previous two and a half years. This is probably due to the success achieved through MG’s intensive efforts to carry out the program and public pressure resulting from publicity given the program by MG and the Bavarian press.

BUT MG LAND REFORM officials are still far from satisfied with the results to date. They point out that of the 175,000 acres available for redistribution under the land reform law, only 66,000 acres have been transferred to the Land Settlement Agency, and only 52,000 acres have been distributed for settlement purposes. Against the

(Continued on page 28)